

CAUDATUS ANGLICUS

A MEDIÆVAL SLANDER

BY GEORGE NEILSON

1896

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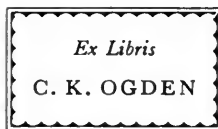
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Trials on Englishmen!

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CAUDATUS ANGLICUS:

A MEDIÆVAL SLANDER.

BY

GEORGE NEILSON,

Author of "TRIAL BY COMBAT," &c.

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G. N.

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CAUDATUS ANGLICUS:

A MEDIÆVAL SLANDER.

I. *The epithet, caudatus.*

THE renowned Coke upon Littleton quotes approvingly the brocard that antiquity did nothing without sound reason.¹ It is a proposition no truer than a great many other utterances of proverbial wisdom. Our forefathers did and thought a great many very unreasonable things. The popular creed has always been well stocked with such inheritances of ignorance and myth. Sometimes it is possible to trace the origin of superstitions and misconceptions; oftener, hid in the depths of a far off time, they set at naught the most determined efforts of research. But although the quest after a positive solution may fail, there is always a gain to knowledge in the collection and grouping of a mass of facts of which the inner significance is but partially understood. In this spirit I approach the strange mediæval reproach which so often gratified Frenchmen and Scots desirous of poking ill-natured fun at their common hereditary foe. There can be no doubt whatever that for centuries Englishmen felt it as a very real and aggravating reproach, a sore thorn in the flesh. Its utter and obvious untruth by no means robbed it of its smart. Malice never galls more deeply than when its shafts are barbed with ridicule. The very absurdity of the thing makes it impossible to argue it away, but the irritation it excites is not a whit less keen on that account.

¹ Nil sine prudenti fecit ratione vetustas.

Scotsmen and Frenchmen believed or professed to believe—which came to the same thing—that Englishmen were, in one particular, not as other men are. In consequence, an opportunity was frequently taken to refer to an alleged fact of natural history so interesting in itself, and so unpalatable to the persons reminded of it. Of course it was scandalously unfair to go, literally, behind the Englishmen's backs with any insinuation of the kind, but then we know that wherever there is racial antagonism fairness becomes a very secondary consideration.

So far as my researches go, it is not until near the end of the twelfth century that the term *caudatus* emerges as an epithet of reproach and contempt applied to Englishmen. Obviously an adjective derived from the Latin *cauda* a tail, its natural and ordinary meaning is *tailed*,¹ so that applied to a man it suggests, in the absence of any better and more convincing explanation, that he possesses a tail—the lack of which forms one of several characteristics of superiority distinguishing common humanity alike from the beasts of the field and the denizens of the water, the forest, and the air. Some scholars of our own time, setting aside the traditional account of the origin of the term as applied to Englishmen, seem to have sought another explanation, which shall be discussed in its due place. But first it is necessary to give the narratives of certain twelfth and thirteenth century chroniclers, followed by historical examples of the actual use of the offensive epithet and by some later literary allusions which close, in international bantering satire, these annals of a jibe.

2. *A legend of St. Augustine, 1143-1205.*

William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum* (circa 1143), tells a story of Augustine's mission to England in the year 597.²

The Saint was preaching very successfully at Cerne in Dorsetshire when certain of the inhabitants, stirred up by the Devil who grieved to lose so many souls, attacked the holy man, dishonoured him with insults, and, going so far

¹ Tayld as bestys, Caudatus. Promptorium Parvulorum.

² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum*, R.S. 184-5; *Scriptores post Bedam*, 142.

as to fasten rays' tails to his garments,¹ drove him despitefully away. In this earliest version of the incident there is no mention of any miraculous vengeance following the act. The offenders quickly repented, craved forgiveness, and were baptised—for which purpose it was, owing to a scarcity of water, necessary for the saint himself to bring to the surface a hidden spring still used in Malmesbury's time and known by Saint Augustine's name. In this earliest and comparatively simple form of the story of the Saint's early experiences in Dorsetshire, the miraculous element is not obtrusively present and does not manifest itself in any miraculous legend of vengeance upon the scoffers. But the legend soon came, if indeed, as is most probable, it was not already in existence. It may even have been known to Malmesbury but critically rejected by him. Although he recorded his fair share of miracles he was in many respects above the superstitions of his time, and perhaps in this instance his silence is an expression of disbelief. There was room enough for a little honest doubt at such a juncture, but it must be owned that presumptions are against the ascription to him of a scepticism so robust.

In Master Robert Wace's romance of the "Brut" written (*circa* 1155) only a few years later than Malmesbury's Histories—which were amongst the authorities used in its composition—the legend reappears.²

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Sains Augustins les sermona | [Saint Augustine preached to them |
| Et la loi Deu lor prêça. | And taught them the law of God. |
| Cil furent de male nature | But they were of evil nature ; |
| Qui de lor sermon n'orent cure. | They cared not for his preaching. |
| La ou li sains lor sermonoit | Even there—where the saint was preaching to them |
| Et la loi Deu lor anonçoit, | And declaring unto them God's law— |
| A ses dras de tries lor pendoient | On his garments they hung |
| Keues de raies qu'il avoient ; | The tails of ray-fish which they had. |
| Od les keues l'on envoièrent | With tails they sent him off |

¹ Ita ut etiam caudas racharum vestibus ejus affigerent. A modern corrective but erroneous reading is *vaccarum* for *racharum* proposing to substitute cow tails instead of fish tails! See the Monasticon, ed. 1846, vol. ii. p. 621.

² Wace's Brut (ed. Le Roux de Lincy), Rouen, 1836-38, vol. ii. pp. 251-3, lines 14165-190. I have to thank Mr. Joseph Bain, of the Record Office, for kindly making for me the transcript from Wace, whose Brut, in the original French, is, strange to say, to be found in no public library in either Edinburgh or Glasgow.

Et bien longement le cachierent.
 Et il proia nostre Signor
 Que d'icele grant deshonor
 Et de cele grant avilance
 Ait en ax s'ire et demostrance.
 Et il si orent voirement
 Et aront pardurablement,
 Car trestot cil qui l'escarnèrent
 Et qui les keues li pendirënt
 Furent cõe et cões orent,
 Ne onques puis perdre ne's porent.
 Tot cil ont puis este coë,
 Qui furent de tel parenté;
 Keues ont de tries en la car,
 En ramanbrance de l'escar
 Qu'il firent al Deu ami
 Qui des keues l'orent laidi.

And chased him far away.
 And he prayed that Our Lord
 For that great dishonour
 And that great disgrace
 Would wreak upon them his anger and
 judgment.
 And verily they had it
 And shall have it forever.
 For all those who did him shame
 Were tailed and had tails,
 They can never lose them more.
 All of them have been tailed since then,
 All who were of that kin,
 Tails have they in the flesh
 In remembrance of the shame
 Which they did to the friend of God
 When they put tails upon him.]

Here we have the legend almost as it were in its cradle, and yet already in all its fulness. The narrative in this famous poem describes the arrival of St. Augustine at Dorchester, locating there the insult of the fish tails, now followed by consequences greivous and degrading.¹ Subsequent versions are only echoes—some with distorted variations.

What Wace had said in Old French was, not later than 1205, said again by Layamon in Old English in his expanded reading of the Brut. It describes St. Augustine's arrival—at Dorchester according to one manuscript, at Rochester² according to another—where his preaching was derided; the

¹ Augustine's character as generally reflected in tradition was not absolutely out of keeping with the conception of it conveyed by this story. It was roundly asserted that he had the power of punishing sins on earth and avenging injuries upon him (W. Thorn in Decem. Scrip., 2005). His bearing was felt by the Briton bishops to be offensively haughty at the conference of 603, which broke up in threats of God's vengeance, invoked by him on the heads of the Welsh monks (Beda, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ii. 2), threats which were supposed to be fulfilled some ten years afterwards. Even during his own lifetime he had acquired a reputation for his miracles (Beda, i. 31), and the Pope wrote to him not to be puffed up on that account. Some with which he was credited have a very stern aspect (Bromton in Decem. Scrip., 736, *Actes of English Votaries* (1546), p. 24). On the whole, Augustine seems to have been reputed a severe, not to say vindictive, saint—like a good many of his brethren.

² A difference of locality jealously regarded by county patriots desirous of shifting the burden off their shoulders to those of their neighbours.

inhabitants spurned him, took rays' tails and hung them on his cope—

And nomen tailen of rehzen
And hangede on his cape.

Indignant he prayed to God for vengeance. The prayer was heard and God sent his judgment on "the folk that hanged the rays' tails on the clerks. "The tails came upon themselves, therefore is it that they be tailed. "The whole race was disgraced for muggles¹ they had, and in all companies "men call them mugglings,² and every freeman speaketh foul of them and "of English freemen in foreign parts; for that deed they have a red face."

Tha tailen heom comen on³
Ther voren heo maȝen iteled beon
Iscend wes that mon-cun
Muggles heo hafden
And inen hirede ælches
Men clepeth heom muglinges
And ever elc freo mon
Ful telleth heom on
And Engliſce freomen
In uncute londen
For than ilke dede
Heo habbeoth neb rede.

Layamon's additions to the legend (lines 29587-600) are the point of chief contrast between his account and that of Wace. From Layamon we first hear of the nickname of Mugglings, and of the shame which the story occasioned not to the men of Dorsetshire or of Kent merely, but to Englishmen generally. Go where they might their faces were reddened by unkind reminders. Sarcastic foreigners could not be expected to display a tedious nicety in fine distinctions between English counties. It was far better for their purpose to slump the conclusions into a single adjective. If everybody always desired to be exactly accurate what would become of satire?

¹ Muggles, tails (Stratmann). See Bower's rendering, chapter 9, below. Sir F. Madden, however, glossed the word as ray-fish.

² Mugglings, tailed persons.

³ Layamon, ed. Sir F. Madden, line 29585. Sir F. Madden's elaborate note on the passage is almost exhaustive.

3. *An incident concerning Archbishop Thomas Becket, 1170.*

A second story—not, however, like that just told, expressly in its initial form connecting itself with the origin of the tails—is told of the last days of Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury, murdered in his cathedral on 29th December, 1170. There is nothing miraculous about it as given by the annalists of the time, and it may be set down as unquestionably a fact. On the Christmas day before his martyrdom, according to Ralf de Diceto, a well-informed contemporary,¹ he, with candles burning, solemnly excommunicated Robert de Broc. Robert it was said “had to insult and shame him docked the tail (*decurtaverat*) of a horse² of the Archbishop’s carrying provisions.”³ Roger of Hoveden, also a contemporary of repute, says⁴ that the day before the excommunication Broc had cut off the tail of the Archbishop’s sumpter. There is even better evidence of the injurious insult, for two monks who were in Canterbury when the Archbishop was murdered record the direct words of the prelate himself. In the interview with the murderers in the palace before the great tragedy was consummated, the Archbishop expressly complained. “A mare in my service,” he said,⁵ “has in contempt of my name had its tail cut off—as though I could be “put to shame by the mutilation of a beast!” Legend began to grow very quickly after the martyrdom. One of the Canterbury monks declares⁶

¹ R. de Diceto, R.S. i. 342. Decem Scriptores, 555. Repeated in Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* (R.S.) ii. 280.

² This was an insult of well-known type. Instances occur in Blind Harry’s *Wallace*, v., line 753. See also quotation in Du Cange *voce* caudatus. Si ipse aliquos equites in instanti equos decaudaret. To cut off the tails of their horses was a token of grief and humiliation with the Saracens. See *Itinerarium Richardi* iv., 14, Archer’s *Crusade of Richard I.*, p. 144.

³ There was, however, a different ground of excommunication. *Archæologia Cantiana*, vi. 35-6.

⁴ Hoveden (R.S.), ii. 14. Scriptores post Bedam, 298.

⁵ William of Canterbury in *Materials for History of Archbishop Thomas Becket* (R.S.), i. 130. Jumentum in nominis mei contemptum tanquam in diminutione bestiae dehonestari possim cauda truncatum est. A slightly different version is given by Gervase of Canterbury, see Gervase (R.S.) i. 225, and in Decem Scriptores, 1415.

⁶ William of Canterbury in *Materials for History of Archbishop Thomas Becket*, i. 120.

that such was the efficacy of the murdered primate's anathema hurled against Broc by the excommunication, that the very dogs rejected the bread which his hands had touched, although greedily accepting food from others. No contemporary historian, however, whispers a word to parallel in the case of St. Thomas, the divine vengeance evoked by the prayer of St. Augustine. Marvels enough were ascribed to St. Thomas in the days of Henry II., but that was not one. That myth took a long time to grow, and when it did it was doubtless through a mere confusing of the two Archbishops.

4. *Early instances of the epithet, 1190-1292.*

Incidents of crusading history compel the inference that, in the twelfth century, there was a widespread notion that Englishmen had tails. Richard of Devizes, describing the crusade of Richard I. and the events at Messina in 1190, represents the Greeks as eager to have vengeance on the English king and his *caudati*, his tailed men. For, says he, both Greeks and Sicilians called all the followers of that king "Englishmen" and "tailed."¹ This passage, from the pen of a writer living at the time, is the oldest instance² I have seen of the term *caudati* applied to Englishmen. Its direct bearing on the meaning, and indirect evidence on the origin of the term, are of high importance. It implies that the offensive adjective was used as special and peculiar to the English. That it was at the time, when it first came into use, thought to mean a tailed man is brought out clearly by an Early English poem, probably of the thirteenth century, dealing with this very period. In the romance of Richard Coer de Leon the Emperor of Cyprus dismisses certain messengers of King Richard with these words—³

Out taylards of my paleys!
Now go and say your tayled king
That I owe him no thing.

¹ Richard of Devizes, Eng. Hist. Soc. p. 20. *Tota injuriarum de rege Anglorum et caudatis suis ultio quaeritur. Graeculi et Siculi omnes hunc regem sequentes Anglos et caudatos nominabant.*

² It is a pleasure to acknowledge my obligation to Mr. T. A. Archer for drawing my attention to this and other passages.

³ Richard Coer de Leon in Weber's *Metrical Romances*, ii. 31.

And in describing the English king's homeward journey from the Holy Land and the events leading up to his captivity, the romance narrates¹ how when he had fallen into the clutches of the King of Almayne

The king called Rychard be name
And clepyd hym taylard and sayde hym schame.

These taunts leave nothing to be desired in the matter of explicitness. They demonstrate the European area of the belief. Needless to say, the French relished it exceedingly. In 1217, after Prince Louis of France had sustained a defeat at Lincoln at the hands of the national party amongst the English barons, a wit of the French side made rather a poor show of mirth in a couple of verses,² declaring that King Philip was not afraid.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Rex in Rupella regnat et amodo bella. Non timet Anglorum quia caudas fregit eorum.</p> | <p>[In old Rochelle our monarch reigns All fear of England he disdains. And why? Their warlike valour quails Before him, since he broke their tails.]³</p> |
|---|---|

So gross a travesty of the truth was this, that not only the victory in the encounter of rival rhymes, but the more substantial victory of fact, lay unequivocally with the Englishmen, who retorted that they had used their tails in tying up the French.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Ad nostras caudas Francos, ductos ut alaudas Perstrinxit restis: superest Lincolnia testis.</p> | <p>[By a rope at our tails the French were strung, Like larks in a row for the spit they hung; If I tell not true as it was that day, I appeal to Lincoln: let Lincoln say.]</p> |
|--|--|

In this same year, 1217, occurs the earliest Scottish use of this reproach. There had been a highly unpopular mission of English churchmen into this country, and a Scottish satirist in some objurgatory verses took the opportunity of delicately referring to the intrusive priests as possessing tails.⁴ Similarly in France, towards the middle of the thirteenth century, the idea

¹ Richard Coer de Leon, ii. 83, cited in N. and Q. series, vii. 212.

² Chronicle of Lanercost, 95.

³ Once for all, let me in sackcloth and ashes apologise for the metrical and other iniquities of my verse translations. Probably the *ryme coulée* or tailed rhyme would have been the appropriate measure! But the doggerel muse is not propitious.

⁴ Bower ii. 41. Sunt prædicti clerici nuncii caudati.

flourished. Jacques de Vitry, a well-known writer who died about 1240, in a severe account of Parisian life in general and of Parisian students in particular, numbers among the vices of the latter a spirit of detraction which led them to indulge in impudent sneers and insults¹ towards the peoples of other nations. The Flemings they said were soft as butter, the Brabanters were men of blood, the Burgundians were brutes and fools, the Germans were filthy madmen, while the English, who head the list, were toppers and tailed—*Anglicos potatores et caudatos*.

Frenchmen and Englishmen have never worked well as allies. We have already seen that in the crusade of Richard I. the epithet *caudatus* was flung at the English in Sicily. In Palestine, during another crusading campaign in 1250, a quarrel broke out, in consequence of which the joint camp was broken up, the English disjoining their quarters from those of the French. Count Robert of Artois, brother of Louis IX., remarked to his companions that he was very glad the army of the noble Francs² was quit of those tailed men. At a later stage he repeated the offensive remark in the presence of the English commander, the renowned and valorous earl of Salisbury, William Longsword. Count Robert lost his temper at a council of war, and in a burst of passion upbraided the English with cowardice. "Oh the poltroonery,"³ he said, "of you timorous men with tails! What a blessed riddance it were for the army 'to be purged of tails and tailed men!' Stung by the sneer the stout Englishman hotly answered that in the fight that day he would⁴ ride where Count Robert would not dare to follow his horse's tail. His indignant vaunt was justified. There was a fierce battle. The Soldan's army of Saracens far outnumbered the champions of the Cross; they swept and surged around them, says Matthew Paris, "like the stormy waves around an islet in the sea." In the very height of the battle, when the fate of the day swung in the balance and only the absolute constancy and union of the allies could avoid destruc-

¹ Jacques de Vitry. *Historia Orientalis et Occidentalis* (1597), p. 279.

² Matthew Paris (R.S.), v. 134, ed. Wats, p. 785. Nunc bene mundatur magnificorum exercitus Francorum a caudatis.

³ Ibid. (R.S.), v. 151, ed. Wats, 790. O timidorum caudatorum formidolositas quam beatus quam mundus praesens foret exercitus si a caudis purgaretur et caudatis.

⁴ Erimus credo hodie ubi non audebis caudam equi mei attingere.

tion, and whilst Longsword was fighting lionlike against a host, Count Robert, panic-stricken, counselled flight. "Please God," returned the gallant Englishman, "my father's son shall never flee from any Saracen." "Many a soul," says the historian, "he sent to Tartarus." But at last the overmastering odds prevailed, and the English general lay dead. And the blustering Count, the "noble Franc" who had taunted the tailed Englishmen with cowardice, and, when the stress of battle with the infidel called for the last effort of every Christian blade, himself turned tail—what of him? One forgives the evident satisfaction of the chronicler in recording that he did not escape—that he was drowned in his ignoble flight.

That the phrase was not confined to the Continent for its currency is shewn by an allusion in a chronicle¹ of the Barons' Wars, where *caudatus* appears as an epithet of *Anglicus*, but, unfortunately, in a connection which makes it difficult to determine its precise meaning. It may have been "tailed," or it may have been "cowed," and it may have carried a suggestion of fox-like cunning. The phrase, epigrammatic with probably a double sense, certainly contains an allusion to the tails—of interest as made by an Englishman to his own fellow-countrymen.

The continual tension and irritation between the French and English explains the bitterness of some phrases and episodes. In 1292 a brawl took place between English and French sailors; the latter complained² to King Philip, and—*ejus bilem contra Anglicos commoverunt*—raised his bile against the English, saying that it was a disgrace to himself and to his people that they should have been so ill-treated—*ut a caudatis taliter tractarentur*—by men with tails. Hostilities and reprisals followed, and so hot was the international fever of hate that the privileges of even pilgrims and scholars were not respected. Charles, brother of the French king, hanged several unfortunates, and, says the chronicler³ of Lanercost, "side by side with "them he hanged live dogs because he reckoned dogs and Englishmen

¹ Johannes de Oxenedes (R.S.), 223; see also notes to Rishanger (Camden Society), 131. Illo tempore baronibus illuxerat dies sanctificatus ibi quicunque fugerat Anglicus est caudatus plenus versutiis fallax et instabilis et exanimatus.

² Rishanger (R.S.), 130-1.

³ Chronicon de Lanercost, p. 150.

"alike." "They made no difference," says another English historian,¹ "between a dog and an Englishman"—a barbarity, unfortunately, far from unique,² and theoretically based on a cruel symbolism.

5. *Some Scottish examples, 1296-1341.*

The policy of Edward I. was bringing Scotland and England, after a century of peace, into deadliest enmity. When the war of independence began, the objectionable epithet *caudatus* was from the outset found established in the north. On more than one occasion our forefathers are recorded to have enlivened the preliminary skirmishes before their battles by mirthful allusions to the tails with which they accredited the adversary. It must be owned that the joke was of ill omen for their side. In each historical example of its use by the Scots it was an expression of the

¹ Knyghton in *Decem Scriptores*, 2495.

² Thus in 1182 a Roman cardinal was murdered in Constantinople by the Greeks, who, not content with putting him to death, tied a dog to his corpse so that the dog's tail was against his mouth. (Robert de Monti.) In 1127 Bertulf, provost of Bruges, suspected of complicity in the murder of Earl Charles the Good, was put to death with every cruelty which the fury of the populace could suggest; and the rabble of Ypres, in a frenzy of rage against him, twisted the *viscera* of a dog round his neck, and placed the dog's mouth against his when he was breathing out his soul, equalling him, says the Flemish contemporary authority, Galbert de Bruges in the *Histoire du Meurtre de Charles le Bon*, ch. 57, "with a dog." In Aragon this savage metaphor took a slightly different shape. In 1247 a man was sentenced (see *Du Cange voce* Murelegus) to be drawn from one gate of a city to the other, naked, with a cat hung round his neck behind his back, and to be scourged to death. A dog was the more usual symbol under such circumstances. An old authority on the chivalric duel in France tells in his treatise on the subject (see *Traité du Duel Judiciaire* publiés par B. Frost, Paris, 1872, p. 51-2) that a young Jew hurled his lance at an effigy of Our Lady, "in despite of the Glorious Virgin and of our faith," so that blood sprang from the wound on the Glorious Lady's forehead. There was an insufficiency of evidence to prove the charge by the ordinary forms of law, and a frail old man, a carpenter, challenged the Jew to judicial combat. Battle was adjudged; it was fought with shield and baton—the combatants being of low rank; and the old carpenter gained the victory. The vanquished Jew, who confessed his crime, was hanged between two mastiffs, because, says Oliver, "it is the custom and the law wills that in doing "justice on a Jew he should be hanged between two dogs as a beastly and infidel man." See also Lecky's *Rationalism in Europe* (1884), ii. 276. Bigotry and ignorance seldom do more harm than when as in these last instances they are mistaken for Christian principles. What wonder that such crude theories had such brutal results. Cp. *Du Cange*, *canem ferre*.

haughty spirit that precedes a fall. It was always a prelude to disaster. Thus in 1296 when Edward I. advanced to the attack of Dunbar the garrison of the castle shouted from behind¹ their battlements that the English were tailed dogs (*canes caudatos*); and they threatened them not with death merely but with amputation of their tails! But the event of the battle, the utter defeat of the Scots, and the immediate surrender of the castle thereupon, supplied a somewhat painful commentary to this ebullition of ancient Scottish wit. Next year the joke turned out no better when it was repeated on the west border. A small squadron of 100 mounted men-at-arms had crossed the Solway, and was on the march inland, followed at a considerable distance by a heavy body of infantry. The men of Annan, gathered on the hill-slope south of the town, do not appear to have been sufficiently alive to the circumstance that the rear of the handful of horse was being brought up by a battalion of 20,000 foot. They twitted the advanced guard of cavalry with their small numbers, and jeered at them as (*canes caudatos*) tailed dogs.² As at Dunbar so here the Scots had need to rue the jesting of that day. The heavy English horse dashed at the band of Scots, cut their way through, and with the aid of the infantry which hastened to their assistance, killed some 300 of the dalesmen who had been too hasty with their jibes. Yet again in 1332, on the night before Dupplin battle, the Scottish troops mustered in defence of the land from the invading expedition of Edward Baliol and his English allies, went to bed singing—according to the testimony of one of our own oldest historians—songs about the tailed Englishmen.³ They prophesied valiantly the downfall of these

Anglici caudati pro caudis vituperati.

Inspired, it is hinted, more by Bacchus than by Mars, they declaimed in melodious numbers how they would on the morrow turn their tails into

¹ Hemingburgh, ii. 103. Clamantes ad nostros et eos probrose vocantes canes caudatos et talia quæque insuper comminantes in mortem et caudarum abscissionem.

² Hemingburgh, ii. 146-7. Knyghton in Decem Scriptores, 2522.

³ Bower, ii. 304-5. Depromentes cantus et dicens quod—

Anglici caudati pro caudis vituperati.

De caudis eorum ut dixerunt funes sibi facerent ad seipsos Anglos in crastino vinciendos.

ropes to bind them as prisoners; or, according to a sterner version,¹ (with a side reference to a preliminary degradation of capital punishment for treason) how they would draw them to the gallows by their tails. The morrow, however, saw another sight, the forces of Baliol routed their opponents, and proved for at least the third time in Scottish history that boastful jokes are apt to be premature. The worthy Abbot of Inchcolm, a preacher almost as much as a chronicler, could not be expected to resist so improving an occasion at once to point a moral and—if it may be said without suspicion of a pun—to adorn a tale. “Assuredly,” said he, “it is better to be humbly fearful than proudly confident. O Scottish people, “in arms sufficiently strenuous, but stubborn and proud, knowing little of “the future, walking amid impending marvels, you heed not the sentence “of Seneca that never did proud joy stand secure! Yesterday you were “telling how you would make ropes of the tails of the English to tie them “with. Now, you are yourselves bound in actual chains!”

It was some time before Scotland fairly got rid of the consequences of that invasion, before she freed herself of the fetters which the aggressive policy of Edward III. endeavoured to cast round her. An undated poem (of at latest about the year 1341, when the capture of the castles of Edinburgh and Roxburgh had almost completed the expulsion of the English garrisons from the country, but perhaps a few years earlier) contains, although difficult to understand in its entirety, allusions manifest enough.²

The tails came in they had their day,
Now they're curtailed and cut away;
Freedom restored regains its voice—
Sing Scotland therefore and rejoice!

¹ Liber Pluscardensis, i. 265. Dicentes quod Anglicos caudatos ad suspendium traherent.

² *Exprobatio Scotorum.*

Caude causantur regnarunt apocapantur
Privantur caude fas fandi Scotia plaude.

Responsio Anglorum.

Scotia scotabit strebae Scotus vix latitabit
Anglia jam frange fas fandi Scotia plange.

Wright's Political Songs (Camden Society), p. 375.

The translation of the Responsio I willingly leave to someone whose mediæval Latin is not so slender as mine. “Scotia scotabit strebae” I do not understand.

There is one further instance which probably is to be set down as of the date embraced by the present chapter. Although it does not directly allude to the ever-recurrent topic of the Scoto-Anglic satyrists, there is an oblique glance towards it. Hitherto all the allusions have been to tailed men; this one is to tailed women—a solitary instance of an imputation so ungallant. It occurs in a poem on the extravagance of dress—a theme on the treatment of which the author in one line,

Vestes non homines omnis honorat homo,

clearly forestalls the philosophy of Sartor Resartus that Society is founded upon Cloth, and in another adumbrates a great modern scientific hypothesis. The unknown bard, presumably a Scot, after ridiculing the garb of the Englishman generally, falls foul of his beard like a boar's bristles, and declares that in the whole circuit of the earth there is no more swaggering he-goat. The next object of attack is the dagger; then comes a fling at the hood or hat tied on with a red cord and resembling an earthen pot! After that he concludes with the two following verses¹:—

*Indutam si videris quamquam dominarum
Caudatam percipies duarum ulnarum
Stolam post se trahere; ad modum ferarum
Fugies. Sic funus
Inde quidem domino fert acceptabile munus.*

*Quoddam genus simiae gens est Anglicana
Ceteros quotidie fert ut videt: vana
Plura nunc inertiae dantur et mundana
Mentis lascivorum.
Nobis cunctorum rex praestet regna polorum.*

[Do but look at a dame of degree
Her tail of two ells long² you'll see
—A skirt like what beasts bear behind!
No wonder in fright if you fly
The reason's too obvious why
Ev'n her lord deems her death not unkind.
The Anglican race are but apes;
Each day brings fresh follies and japes
More and more they're to idleness given
More and more they seek only delight
Less and less is their love for the right
But for us may God grant us his heaven.]

¹ Bower, i. 222.

² The Scots Act, 1457, cap. 13, dealt with this. "And as to ither gowyns, that na woman weir . . . taly's of unfittande lenthe." Cp. Bower ii. 374. Sir David Lindsay made this theme classic.

Sovrane, I mene of thir Syde Taillis
Quhilk throw the dust and dubbis traillis
Thre quarteris lang behynd thair heillis
Expres agane all Commonnweillis.

[Mene in the above lines = complain; and syde = long.]

The equation of Englishmen as a species of monkeys may be viewed as an odd empiric forecast of Darwin's graver solution of the universe. How far the base comparison arose from the tail which precedes or the folly which follows it in the poem, the judicious reader can judge for himself.

6. *In fourteenth century chronicle.*

The fourteenth century took up the tale. Robert Manning of Brunne, who in 1338 wrote the *Story of Inghlande*, has a chapter with the express heading—"Why Englishmen are called tailed," and in a few vigorous lines states the traditional cause on the model of Wace and Layamon. Like Layamon he complains that the whole English race is scandalised—

For tailles al Englische kynde ys blamed—

for a peculiarity which in truth only belongs to a few. After mentioning the advent of St. Augustine at Rochester, Manning thus¹ proceeds—

But there he stod them to preche
 And ther savacion for to teche
 Byhynd hym on his clothes they henge
 Righe² tailles on a strenge.
 When they had don that vyleny
 They drof hym thenne wyth maistri
 Fer weys they gan hym chace.
 Tailles they casten in hys face.
 Thys holy man God bisought
 For they hym that vileny wrought
 That on them and on al ther kynde
 Tailed alle men schulde hem fynde
 And God graunted al that he bad³
 For alle that kynde tailles had—
 Tailles hadde and tailles have:
 Fro that vengauce non may them save
 For they wyth tailles the goodeman schamed
 For tailles al Englische kynde ys blamed
 In manie sere⁴ londes seyde
 Of tho tailles we have umbreyde⁵

*Qua de causa Anglici
 vocantur Caudati.*

¹ Robert of Brunne (R.S.), lines, 15193-212.

² Righe, rays'.

³ Bad, prayed.

⁴ Sere, different.

⁵ Umbreyde, abuse.

Somewhat later an Italian poet, Fazio degli Uberti, writing before 1360, supplies an example of the persistency of continental belief in the tails of Englishmen, adding, moreover, a statement of dimensions on which no previous writer had condescended.

Now¹ this I saw not; but so strange a thing
It was to hear, and by all men confirmed
That it is fit to note it as I heard
To wit, there is a certain islet here
Among the rest where folk are born with tails,—
Short as are found in stags and suchlike beasts.

Meanwhile the tails continued to flourish at home, varying their characteristics with each repetition. In the English prose version of the Brut fresh circumstances emerge, shewing not only how the tails came, but, if possible, still more curiously how judicious mothers could obviate the curse.

"Saynt Austine² come to Rouchester and there prechid Goddis worde.
"The paynims therfore hym scornede and caste uppon hym reyghes tayles
"and for more despite they keste uppon hym guttis of reyghes and of other
"fysse wherefore the good man saynt Austyne was sore anoyede and grevede
"and prayed to God that alle the children that shulde be borne afterward
"in that citee of Rochester muste have tayles. And whenne the kyng
"herde and wiste of this vengauce that was falle thurghes saynt Austines
"powere he lette make one howse in honour of God where in wommen
"shulde have hire children at the brugges ende: in whiche hous women
"yette of the citee be delyveride of child."

And still the wonder grew. The alleged terminal equipment of the Englishman was a first-class subject for decorative treatment. Like the lion's tail in heraldry it threw out ornamental shoots at every turn.

7. *In French fifteenth century satire.*

During the wars in France early in the fifteenth century, about the time of Agincourt, a good deal of satirical epigrammatic verse was penned.

¹ From lib. iv., cap. 23, of the Ditta Mondo, by Fazio degli Uberti (1326-1360), cited in Dante and his Circle, by D. G. Rossetti, ii. 434.

² English prose Brut, cap. xcvi. MS. Harl, 24 f. 54 b., cited by Sir F. Madden in Notes to Brut iii. 420-21.

One set of these versicles,¹ falling into line with the subject of this compilation, consists of a railing accusation by the French, followed by a short reply from the English side. The *Versus Francorum* written in rhymed Latin reproach the English people with the evil deeds they have done to their fellow-Christians amongst the French. They charge England with broken faith, and accuse her of being a lover of deceit whilst professing better things. The sting of the satire, however, all goes into the three concluding lines translatable roughly thus:—

Cut off the knotted poisonous tail which thou behind dost bear !
Give ear unto our Prince's words : remember and beware :
For God who gave to thee a tail, crowned him with gracious care.

The English reply written in ordinary elegiacs is blunt to a degree, and merely contains the retort that folk who talk loudest are not the greatest in the fight.

Why liar strik'st thou England thus, thy mouth thy only sword ?
Sole answer to thy prating words, two lines I do accord :
He who is least in arms is best in combat with the tongue ;²
A foolish woman's hard to match for length and strength of lung .

Doubtless there were many such allusions in the fugitive satire of the time. One French song of the type called *vaux-de-vire*, from the pen of

¹ They are published in Wright's *Political Poems*, (R.S.) ii. pp. 127-128.

Versus Francorum.

O gens Anglorum morum flos gesta tuorum
Cur tu Francorum procuras damna bonorum ?
Servorum Christi quos tractas crimine tristi
Et servant isti fidem quam bis renuisti
Sub specie casti fraudem tu semper amasti
Scindas annosam caudam quam fers venenosam
Exaudi praesto tu praesul et memor esto
Qui te caudavit Deus ipsum sanctificavit.

Responsio Anglorum.

Anglorum gentem cur false percutis ore ?
Et pro responso do tibi metra duo
Prævalet in lingua qui non est fortior armis
Nullus in hac pugna plus meretrice valet.

² This was an ancient and pious English opinion of the French. "Fight they can with wordes loud" was the way in which it was expressed by the author of the old romance of Coer de Leon.

Olivier Basselin, dating from that period—perhaps about 1417—begins by merrily declaring that the singer would like to go to live in England. His reason is odd enough.¹

He ! cuidez-vous que je me joue
Et que je voulsisse aller
En Engleterre desmourer ?
Ils ont une longue coue

[Ho ho ! do you know
That I fain would go
Across into Angleterre
In that land to dwell
I should like full well
They carry a long tail there.]

But as a later ballad has it—

Helas ! Olivier Basselin
N'orrons nous point de vos nouvelles ?
Vous ont les Engloys mys à fin.

The English are believed to have brought the satirist to a bad end ; catching the luckless Olivier, they forestalled future sarcasms by hanging him.²

In French hands the witticism was still further drawn out. Not only were tails attributed to the men of England ; the wags affected to find even in English animals distinguishing characteristics. A romancer³ in 1477 drew inferences from the tail of a cat.

8. *In the English Golden Legend.*

Alexander of Essebye (or whoever else was the writer of the chronicle to which, for doubtful reasons, his name was long ago given), an abridger of Matthew of Paris,⁴ is said⁵ to have written that Augustine “when fish tails “were despitely thrown at him by certain men of Dorsetshire was so

¹ Recueil de Chants Historiques Francais (Leroux de Lincy), vol. i. p. 300.

² Work last cited, pp. 229-302.

³ Cited in Du Cange voce caudatus.

Ce Cat nonne vient de Calais
Sa mere fut Cathau la Bleue
Cest du lignage des Anglois
Car il porte tres longue queue.

[This cat comes not from Calais
His mother was Cathau the Blue
His ancestry must have been English
So terribly long is his queue.]

⁴ Descriptive Catalogue of Materials for Brit. Hist. iii. 145.

⁵ Lambarde's Peramb., Kent, sub. Stroude. I am compelled to make this citation from Esseby at second hand as his chronicle is still unpublished, and—being in Canterbury—not easily accessible to me.

"furiously vexed therrwith that he called upon God for revenge and he forthwith heard him and strake them with tails for their punishment." So far there is no variance from what we have read over and over again already. But in the English Golden Legende divergences and new circumstances appear. The story had been absolutely absent from the original *Legenda Aurea*, but the English version finds the tails well developed.

"After this Saynt Austyn¹ entryd in to Dorsetshyre and came in to a towne where as were wycked peple and refused his doctryne and prechyng utterly, and droof hym out of the towne, castyng on him the tayles of thornback or like fisshes, wherefor he besought Almyghty God to shewe his jugement on them, and god sente to them a shameful token for the children that were borne after in that place had tayles, as it is sayd, tyl they had repented them. It is sayd comynly that thys fyl at Strode in Kente; but blessyd be God at this day is no such deformyte."

The sigh of relief in the closing line is noteworthy as a positive statement on a point reckoned of considerable importance amongst the annalists, and one on which they were not all agreed. It decisively at the same time, by the very qualification it imports, betokens the reality and universality of the belief of even fifteenth century England in the actual existence—if not then, at least once upon a time—of the monstrous phenomenon.

A proverbial phrase the "Kentish Longtails"² probably gained currency at an early date, undoubtedly deducing its origin from this strange article in the popular creed; but it does not seem to have been traced as existing in literature until the sixteenth century. Drayton³ made it in a sense the motto of Kent—

Kent first in our account doth to itself apply
Quoth he, the blazon first, Longtails and liberty.

¹ The lyf of Saynt Austyn, *Golden Legende*, printed 1483, fol. clxxxiii; see, too, *Nova Legenda Angliæ* (Capgrave) 1516, fol. xxx.

² Ray's Proverbs. Halliwell's Dictionary, voce *Longtails*.

³ Polyolbion, song xxiii. For a supposed quotation from Peter Pindar, The Men of Strode are born with horses' tails, see Notes and Queries, 4th series, vi. p. 370-1.

9. *The oldest Scottish version*—circa 1450.

Scotland, as we have already seen, had heard of the tails, and her historians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries contain quite a respectable body of comment upon them. Walter Bower, Abbot of Inchcolm, devotes a large part of a chapter of the *Scotichronicon*¹ to the subject, following very closely the lines of the narrative as it had first appeared in Layamon. When Saint Augustine, he tells us,² began to proclaim the word of life to the heathen West Saxons in Dorsetshire, he came to a town where no one would receive him or listen to his preaching. The inhabitants would have none of him. They contradicted³ everything and twisted by sinister interpretation all he said, and, horrible to relate, sewed fish tails to the great missionary's garments. "But," says our worthy informant always zealous for the honour of a Saint, "what they supposed they were doing to shame the "holy father came home to themselves and their posterity as an eternal "disgrace and a scandal to their unoffending country. For the Lord smote "them *in posteriora* to their everlasting ignominy so that not only on their "own but on their successors' persons similar tails grew ever after." Such tails, he adds, were called *mughel* in the mother tongue of the country, on which account the town in which the blessed Augustine was so insulted

¹ The original *Scotichronicon* of Fordun, which Bower amplified and continued, does not contain the story. Neither does Wyntoun's *Cronykil*.

² Bower, ii. 138-9.

³ Quod dictu quoque nefandum est caudas piscium in ejus vestibis suere et suspendere non timuerunt. Sed quod ipsi in Sancti patris injuriam facere crediderunt, sibi et suis posteris in dedecus sempiternum et innocenti patriæ verterunt in opprobrium. Nam percussit eos Deus in posteriora, opprobrium sempiternum dans illis ita ut in partibus pudendis tam in ipsis quam eorum successoribus, similes caudæ nascerentur. Vocatur autem hujusmodi cauda ab indigenis patriâ linguâ *Mughel*: unde et villa in qua beato Augustino hujusmodi irrogata est injuria nomen sortita est *Muglington*, id est villa *Muglingorum*, usque in præsentem diem. Fertur etiam quod eorum exemplo in provincia *Merciorum* in villa quæ *Thamewyth* dicitur beato viro ab incolis loci simile dedecus factum fuerit: sed non impune: quia tam ipsi quam eorum posteris sicut omnibus notum est pari pœna et opprobrio verecundati sunt. Simile postea accidit tempore exilii beati Thomæ primatis Angliæ quod ad ejus opprobrium, ut aestimabant, sed mentita est iniquitas sibi illi de *Rocestria* deturpaverunt, et absciderunt caudam caballi ejus: unde et posteris eorum illic nati inventi sunt caudati.

took the name of Muglington,¹ and bears it until this day. Bower further mentions that the same indignity was done to the Saint by the inhabitants of Thamewyth in Mercia, but not unrevenged, because the same consequences befell. And he adds that long afterwards, in the time of the banishment of the blessed Thomas the Archbishop, the people of Rochester in Kent docked the tail of his horse for the purpose of disgracing the saint as they thought, but their iniquity deceived itself: they and their posterity born there thenceforth were found to possess tails.

A new feature appears here—a doubling of the tradition: it is the first we have heard of an association between the tails and St. Thomas Becket. That by this time both versions were current in England, I take to be indubitable. The worthy Abbot of Inchcolm was not a romancer who invented such things. He must have had earlier written authority before him when he wrote.

10. *Poetical Tail-pieces from Dunbar and Skelton.*

Leaving now for a little the arid paths along which the chroniclers travel, it will be a pleasant change for us to digress a while in the fields of verse—to part company with the historians and turn to the poets of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. They had a pleasant way in those days of saying things which sounded a great deal worse than the actual meaning they conveyed. Scottish poets being eminently human could not forget so good a hit at the Englishmen, and accordingly their works include a number of tail-pieces reminiscent of the subject. Dunbar, the national poet of the time, has one interesting allusion. In the *Flyting* with Kennedie, amongst the thousand and one unflattering similitudes with which he bespattered his rhyming adversary, he observed² that—

he that dang Sanct Augustine with ane rumple
Thy fowll front had.

The word rumple, meaning a tail, was taken up and used in a different

¹ This is so far as I have seen the earliest reference to such a place, and I have not been able to find any such place existing. There was of old a “Muglyngwyc” in Durham, which has become “Muggleswick.” *Notes and Queries*, 8th series, vii. 449.

² *Flyting*, line 125; *Dunbar's Poems* (Scot. Text Soc.) ii. p. 15.

connection by Kennedie in his reply. Not to be behindhand in allusions to classical points in the national history, Kennedie flung in the teeth of Dunbar a charge against the patriotism of one of his ancestors.¹

Corspatrik that we of tressoun reid
Thy forefader, maid Irisch and Irischmen thin,
Throw his tressoun broght Ingliise rumplis in.

Much more curious was the war of rhyme in two languages waged between John Skelton, the wit and poet of England during the first half of the reign of Henry VIII. on the one hand, and George Dundas,² at one time a professor in Aberdeen, on the other.

Skelton had crowed so unmercifully over the English victory at Flodden, and had exhausted himself in such base comparisons to the detriment of the Scots that Dundas commands our sympathy in inditing a reply. He evidently thought that as Achilles was vulnerable at the heel so was the Englishman at the tail, and he therefore directed his shafts to that delicate part.

Anglicus a tergo
Caudam gerit;³
Est canis ergo.
Anglice caudate
Cape caudam
Ne cadat a te
Ex causa caudæ
Manet Anglica
Gens sine laude.

[The Englishman behind
carries a tail:
He is a dog therefore.
O tailed Englishman
take care of your tail
Lest it fall off:
because of the tail
The English nation
remains without honour.]

¹ Flyting, line 350.

² Mr. Dyce's notes to Skelton's Works, iii. 186.

³ Professor Wattenbach published (*Anzeiger für Kunde der Deutschen Vorzeit*, 1874, col. 214) a poem from a MS. in the Berlin Library beginning thus:—

Anglicus a tergo caudam gerit: est pecus ergo:
Cum tibi dicit ave, sicut ab hoste cave.

See Notes and Queries, vi. 493. Professor Wattenbach says he has not met anywhere else a similar mention of tailed Englishmen, and supposes that it might have originated in a peculiar way of dressing the hair among the Anglo Normans. On the same principle the French use the term *queue* for the pigtail. See note by Mons. H. Gaidoz in N. and Q. last reference. A couplet quoted by Bower (i. 221) has the same play upon the Ave as that in the Berlin MS.

Anglicus est angelus, cui nemo credere potest
Cum tibi dicit Ave, tanquam ab hoste cave.

This was civility itself compared with the "Noble Poet Skelton's" reply, evincing a very pretty capacity for bilingual Billingsgate:—

Diffamas patriam qua non
est melior usquam.

Cum cauda plaudis dum
possis ad ostia pultas
Mendicans; mendicus eris
mendaxque bilinguis

Scabidus horribilis quem
vermes sexque pedales ¹

Corrodunt misere; miseris
genus est maledictum

Skelton nobilis poeta.

Gup Scot ye blot
Laudate Caudate
Set in better
Thy pentameter.
This Dundas,
This Scottishe as,
He rymes and railles
That Englishmen have tailes
Skeltonus laureatus
Anglicus natus
Provocat musas
Contra Dundas
Norpacissimum² Scotum
Undique notum
Rusticè fotum
Vapidè potum

Skelton Laureat
After this rate
Defendeth with his pen
All Englishmen
Agayn Dundas
The Scottish asse.
Shake thy tayle Scot like a cur,

[You defame a country
than which there no better anywhere.
With your tail you flatter
while you can, begging porridge
from door to door
You will always be a beggar
and a double tongued liar
A horrible scurvy rogue
whom worms a foot and a-half long
Miserably gnaw: your race
is accursed for its wretches.]

[Skelton laureate
Englishman born
Challenges the muses
Against Dundas
the back biting Scot
It is known everywhere
that home-brewed
is tasteless drink.]

¹ I suppose this is a corruption for *sesquipedales*, which appears to make rather better sense.

² This word being unintelligible I have supposed it may be a corruption of *mordacissimum* Mr. Dyce's edition has *spurcissimum*.

For thou beggest at every mannes dur.
 Tut Scot I sey,
 Go shake thy dog hey !
 Dundas of Galaway
 With thy versyfyeng rayles
 How they have tayles.

In these international metrical amenities one easily supposes that the tail is only a handle for a sarcastic pull, and that it is recognised on both sides as a poetic figment; but we shall find the historians of the period still continuing, with the gravity due to a phenomenon so remarkable, to regard it as at least a fact of the past, if not also of the present.

11. *From Major to Bellenden.*

John Major, a century later than Bower, by his variations from the other writers, imports elements of special curiosity. Worthy man as he was, it was not enough for him to make a mere record of abnormal facts. It was necessary to fit them into the scheme of the universe. He therefore sought to lift the question out of the region of simple marvel and place it on a scientific basis. Approaching it by a consideration of the general causes of peculiarities among men, he says that men's complexions in different parts of the earth are largely the product of climate; but that the deformed countenances of the Arctic peoples are not so—they are the result of the influence of the heavens. For the same reason it is, he says, that in parts of Africa men are born with the heads of dogs. Thus armed for his attack on the problem of origin of the tails of men, he proceeds from the general to the particular.

His story is that when Saint Augustine was preaching at Rochester¹ the rabble derisively threw fish-tails at the man of God, whereupon he prayed to the deity that henceforth the little children of that place might in punishment for that sin be born with tails, so that thus warned they might learn not to condemn the saints. "In consequence," says he, "as the English annals tell, the little children were born with tails. This has very little to

¹ *Historia*, ii. cap. 9.

"do with the influence of the heavens. And I do not think that at the present time men are born there with tails, but that this punishment was only inflicted for a time, so that the unbelieving race might give ear to the learned man. Scottish and French writers say differently, but I do not agree with them."

This critical attitude towards a historic question is characteristic of the period. Doubt and science were asserting themselves everywhere, although everywhere old credulity had left its trace. John Major was not disposed to disbelieve wholly, and, in spite of Frenchmen and Scots and the annals of the English themselves, he made a compromise. Not now but formerly had these children been born with tails. Even these he was willing to reduce to the utmost. Tails, they had been, to be sure, but not a permanent result of climate or of the influence of the stars, only a temporary expedient for hastening the good work in Kent. The compromise was cautious.

Hector Boece, with his fondness for the marvellous, might have been expected to be of a less sceptical frame of mind on the subject, but, singular to say, he appears to have quietly suppressed all mention of the matter; as did also William Stewart, his metrical translator. But Bellenden, who rendered his Latin into Scottish prose, and took considerable latitude not only by systematic curtailment but also by occasional interpolations, presents the adventure of Saint Augustine amongst the men of Dorsetshire in such a guise as to add to rather than detract from the marvel. "Finalie," says he, "quhen this haly man Sanct Austine wes precheand to the Saxons in Miglinton thay wer nocht onlie rebelland to his precheing bot in his contemplioun thay sewit fische talis on his abilyement. Otheris alliegis thay dang him with skait rumpillis. Nochtheles this derisioun succedit to thair gret displeasure for God tuk on thaim sic vengeance that thay and thair posterite had lang talis mony yeris eftir. In memorie heirot the barnis that ar yit born in Miglinton hes the samin deformite bot the wemen havand experience thair of fleis out of this toun in the time of thair birth and eschapis this malediction be that way."¹

¹ Bellenden's Boece, book ix. chap. 17.

The final sentence is curious, and may be compared with the similar expedient referred to in an earlier chapter.¹ Even a saint could be juggled out of his curse.

12. *A practical joke, 1566.*

Though we have seen that in all these examples the tail never takes a concrete shape, there is on record one very singular example of its appearing as an actuality. At the baptism of James VI., on 17th December, 1566, quite a scandal was created by a Frenchman, who, either wilfully or inadvertently, considerably disturbed the equanimity of the English guests at the great banquet given in honour of the auspicious event of the day.²

"At the principall bankett ther fell out ane gret eylest and gruge amang
"the Englis men: for a Frenchman callit Bastien devysed a number of men
"formed lyk sattyres with lang tailes and whippis in ther handes runnyng
"befoir the meit quhilk wes brocht throw the gret hall upon ane trym engyn
"marching as apperit it alain with musiciens clothed lyk maidins playing
"upon all sortis of instrumentis and singing of musick.

"Bot the sattiers wer not content only to red roun bot pat ther handis
"behind them to ther tailes quhilkis thay waggit with ther handis in sic
"sort as the Englisemen supponit it had been devysed in derision of them
"daftly apprehending that quhilk they suld not seam to have understand.
"For Mester Hattoun Mester Ligniche and the maist part of the gentilmen
"desyred to sowp before the Quen and gret banquet that they mycht se the
"better the haill ordour and cerimonies of the triumphe; bot sa schone as
"they saw the sattires waging their tales or romples they all set down upon the
"bair flure behind the bak of the burd that they suld not see them selves
"scornit as they thocht. Mester Hattoun said unto me gif it wer not in the
"Quenis presens and hall he suld put a dagger to the hart of the Frenche
"knaif Bastien whom he allegit did it for dispyt that the Quen maid mair
"of them than of the Frenchemen."

Mr. Hatton, with his dagger, witnesses sufficiently how thin-skinned the English still were on the subject of the tails, and how the jibe galled.

¹ Chapter 6.

² Sir James Melville's Memoirs (Maitland Club ed.), 171-2. Glasgow (3rd) edition, 1751, p. 150.

13. *Polydore Vergil and John Bale, 1534-46.*

Polydore Vergil, in his history published in 1534,¹ adopted the Becket version of the legend, ignoring Augustine in that connexion altogether. He said that Becket came to Stroud on the Medway, near Rochester where the inhabitants, anxious to do him dishonour, did not hesitate to amputate the tail of his horse, thereby bringing upon themselves an everlasting shame; for by the will of God it happened that all the men springing from the family which wrought that villainy were born with tails like brute beasts. This mark of infamy had, however, according to Polydore, died out with the offending family. Given fresh and European vogue by an author so popular it acted as a whetstone for Continental wit, which made itself merry in Latin verse—a clumsy echo of Polydore's prose. Thus one writer who "suspected" that the attribution of tails to Englishmen was a figment nevertheless rounded off his account of them with what may, by a courtesy title, be called an epigram.²

¹ Polydore Virgil, *Anglicæ Historiæ*, 1534, p. 214. Jam tum cepit sic vulgo negligi, contemni, ac odio haberi, ut cum venisset aliquando Strodom, qui vicus situs est ad ripam Medueiæ fluminis, quod flumen Rocestriam alluit, ejus loci incolæ cupidi bonum patrem ita despectum ignominia aliqua afficiendi, non dubitarint amputare caudam equi, quem ille equitaret, seipsos perpetuo probro obligantes: nam postea, nutu Dei, ita accidit, ut omnes ex eo hominum genere, qui id facinus fecissent, nati sint instar brutorum animalium caudati. Sed ea infamiæ nota jampridem una cum gente illa eorum hominum, qui peccarint, deleta est.

² *Anglos quosdam caudatus esse.*

Susplicabar quod de Anglorum caudis traditur nugatorium esse nec hoc meminisse loco nisi ipsi Anglicarum rerum conditores id serio traderent: nasci videlicet homines instar brutorum animalium caudatos apud Strodom Angliæ vicum ad ripam fluvii Medueiæ qui Roffensem sive Rocestrensem agrum alluit. Narranteque ejus vici incolæ jumento quod D. Thomas Canthuariensis episcopus insideret per ludibrium caudam amputasse ob idque divina ultione adnatas incolis ejus loci caudas: Percussit eos (inquit) in posteriora eorum opprobrium sempiternum dedit illis. De hujusmodi caudis quidam in hunc modum lusit:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Fertur equo Thomæ caudam obtruncasse | [It is said that the Britons cut off the tail |
| Britannos | of Thomas's horse. This is clearly the |
| Hinc Anglos caudas constat habere breves. | reason why they have short tails.] |

*Angliæ Descriptiones Compendium per Guillelmum
Paradinum Cuysselliensem, 1545, p. 69, quoted in
Dyce's notes to Skelton, iii. 186-7.*

Between 1534 and 1546 a great many things happened. The English Reformation became a settled fact, and the reaction against Roman Catholicism was still at its height. John Bale—better known by that name than by his Irish title as Bishop of Ossory—served the Protestant cause manfully with vehement and virulent tongue and pen. In his “Actes of Englysh Votaryes”¹ there are pungent comments upon our legend, and upon Polydore’s version of it. “Johan Capgrave and Alexandre of Esseby sayth that for castynge of fyshe tayles at thys Augustyne Dorsett shyre men had tayles ever after. But Polydorus applyeth yt unto Kentysh men at Stroude by Rochestre for cuttyng of Thomas Beckettes horses taylor. Thus hath England in all other landes a perpetual dyffamy of tayles by their wrytten legendes of lyes, yet can they not wele tell where to bestowe them trulye.”

Further on in his declamation against the Romanists, Bale say that they “in the legendes of their sanctifyed sorcerers diffamed the Englyshe posteryte with tayles as I have shewed afore. That an Englyshman now can not travayle in an other lande by waye of merchandycy or anye other honest occupyenge but yt ys most contumelyously throwne in his tethe that all Englyshmen have tayles. That uncomlye note and report have the nacyon gotten without recover by these laysye and ^{Called Startsmen.} idell lubbers the munkes and the priestes whiche coude fynde no matters to advance their canonyzed Cayns by or their Sayntes (as they call them) but manyfest lyes and knaveryes.”

It needed the Reformation to bring men’s minds to the point of flat denial of the legend. Men had “suspected” it before; John Bale was the first to give it the lie direct.

14. *A Kentishman’s criticisms, 1570.*

John Bale’s objurgations, violent though they were, were not so directly personal as those of William Lambarde, of Lincoln’s Inn, gent., making him-

¹ Edition 1546, pp. 29-30, 76-77. I have used the copy in the Glasgow University Library. The passages are quoted by Mr. S. Baring-Gould in his *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, ed. 1881, p. 147-8.

² Startsmen, men with tails: from A.S. *steort* a tail.

self the mouthpiece of the indignation of the county whose historian he was. The symmetry of Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent*, written in 1570 and published in 1576, might be a little disturbed, but its piquancy was decidedly heightened by the discussion of the matter. He had just begun to describe the manor of Stroud when the tails came up for consideration, with the result that the honest antiquary forgot about Stroud altogether, and wrote an indignant diatribe in defence of the injured honour of the county of Kent.

The story of the tails, no doubt, he said, was "as true as Ovides historie" of Diana whome hee feigneth in great furie to have bestowed upon Actæon "a Deeres head with mightie brow Anthlers." Polydore, he said, "might well have spared to magnifie Becket with this lie so farre off for the time, so incredible for the matter, and so slaunderous for the men." The "Westernmen"—meaning thereby the people of Dorsetshire—might therefore "thinke themselves pleased by Polydore who taking (as you see) the miracle from Augustine applieth it to Becket and so (removing the infamous revenge from them) laieth it upon our men of Kent. But I dare pronounce that Dorsetshyre, Kent and each other part of the realme is little beholden to Alexander [of Essebye¹] and the rest, but least of all to Polydore, who have amongst them brought to passe that as Kentish men be heere at home merily mocked, so the whole English nation is in foreine countries abroad earnestly flowted with this dishonourable note, in so much that many beleeeve as verily that we be monsters and have tailes by nature, as other men have their due partes and members in usuall manner."

After a complaint that Polydore ought to have "brought his Talesman with him" to vouch his narration, Lambarde proceeds with swelling indignation to compare Polydore's version with those of other writers, alleging that that writer had gone beyond the tale as he found it. Polydore could not be content to copy, says he, "but he must needes lash out further and contend to outly the lowdest Legendaries." And he endeavours to shew that Polydore must be attainted of lying by five witnesses.

¹ See Chap. 8 above,

"Nevertheless," says he in a whimsical parenthesis in his invective, "for mine owne part I thinke for all this that he hath saide well in telling us that the posteritie borne of such as curtailed S. Thomas horse were afterwarde plagued with tailes for it. And this forsooth may be the mysterie. It is commonly saide, and not without good cause believed, that Maidens children and Bachelors wives bee ever well taught and nurtured: and no marveile for neither hath the one sort any children, nor the other any wives at all. After the very same figure and phrase may Polydore's speech be verified also. For (as you see well) Brock alone did this great acte, who (being one of the clergie¹) could have no wife and then (if he lived without a concubine) he coulde leave none issue behind him; and so Polydore might safely say that all they which came of him had not onely tailes like beastes, but also feete like fowles, scales like fishes, or whatsoever other unkindly partes that might make up a fit picture for Horace and his friends to be merrie withall. But (in earnest)," he adds with a sudden turn, "I doe not thinke that he meant thus." Lambarde always detected the popish hand under the glove. "As the proverbe is," he says, "*Cauda de vulpe testatur*, the taile is enough to bewray the foxe, And his woordes (*Bonum patrem* the good father) do evidently shew that he would not sticke to straine a point, so that he might glorifie Saint Thomas thereby." In short, tails or no tails, Polydore was to be read of the wiser sort with great wariness, "for, as he was by office collectour of the Peter pence to the Popes gaine and lucre: So sheweth he himselfe thorowout by practise a covetous gatherer of lying Fables."

This piercing and bitter criticism of Polydore must, so far as regards the Kentish Longtails, be set down as unjust. Polydore had fair precedent for all he said. No single feature of the story as told by him was of his inventing. Lambarde, it must be owned, gets very lamely out of it. His main anxiety was to purify the renown of Kent, albeit at the expense of the Westernmen of Dorsetshire. If he failed it was no fault of his: the dead weight of old tradition was too heavy against him.

¹ Lambarde was in error here.

15. *Some seventeenth century literature.*

The note of disbelief first struck by Bale in 1546 was repeated with additional force by Fuller.¹

"Witnesse how when the Villagers in Dorsetshire beat Augustine and "his Fellows and in mockery fastened Fish tailes at their Backs in punish-
"ment hereof *All that*² *Generation had that given them by Nature which*
"*so contemptibly they fastened on the Backs of these Holy men.* Fy for shame!
"he needs an hard Plate on his Face that reports it and a soft Place in
"his Head that believes it."

In another place to be touched on presently he discussed the origin of the aspersion, and sought to rationalise and explain it. There was, however, still a firm body of belief in the human tail. Most noteworthy amongst those who adhered to the faith was John Bulwer, whose curious volume entitled *Anthropometamorphosis*,³ published in 1653, discussed the matter at some length, and adduced an astounding modern instance in support of his opinion that the belief in men's tails was not to be lightly set aside. Pausanias had said there were tailed nations, and Bulwer dimly knew of the tradition of Kent, and had heard that there survived in that county a family, taking its surname from a village near Rochester, all descendants of which had tails, in so much that one could know their descent by their tails. Those appendages had been entailed—the word is Bulwer's—as a curse upon the inhabitants of Stroud by Thomas Becket, the tail of whose horse had been wantonly cut off by them. In the alleged possession of tails by these people Bulwer saw nothing unreasonable. "And "to make it a little more credible" he said "that the rump bone among "brutish and strong-dockt nations doth often spread out with such an "excrecence or beastly emanation, I am informed by an honest young "man of Captain Morris's company in Lieutenant-General Ireton's company,

¹ Church History of Britain endeavoured by Thomas Fuller, 1655, p. 67.

² Quotation from the *Flores Sanctorum*, life of Augustine, pp. 515-6.

³ A notice of this book appears in the *Retrospective Review* (1828), xvi. 213-4, from which the following particulars and extracts are taken. I owe this reference to the kindness of Dr. David Murray.

"that at Cashell in the County of Tipperary in the province of Munster
 "in Carrick Patrick church, seated on a hill or rock, stormed by the Lord
 "Inchequine,¹ and where were neare 700 put to the sword and none saved
 "but the Mayor's wife and his son, there were found among the slain of
 "the Irish, when they were stript, divers with tailes neare a quarter of a
 "yard long. The relator being very diffident of the truth of this story
 "after enquiry was ensured of the certainty thereof by forty souldiers, that
 "testified upon their oaths that they were eye witnesses, being present at
 "the action."

Backed by the oath of forty of Cromwell's troopers what wonder that Bulwer accepted the tails as a human fact? And he had evidence of still higher scientific weight, that, namely, of the "Coryphæus of anatomy," Dr. Harvey, best known to us as the discoverer of the circulation of the blood. Harvey, in his book *De Generatione*, had cited the evidence of a surgeon from the East Indies, that in Borneo "there is a certaine kind of tailed men, of which with some difficulty (for they inhabit the woods) they took a virgin, whom he saw, with a thick fleshy taile of a span long."

In the poetry of the seventeenth century there are a few scattered allusions of no great moment. The *Musarum Deliciae*² of Sir. John Mennis has an unseemly and foolish passage on the subject. In *Hudibras*³ there is some play on it. Andrew Marvel, in his "Loyal Scot,"⁴ thus illustrates the seriousness of a Bishop's wrath.

Never shall Calvin pardoned be for sales;
 Never for Burnet's sake, the Lauderdale;
 For Becket's sake Kent always shall have tails.

16. *Explanations other than the traditional.*

The traditional explanation of the tails is a single consistent story, although it has two variant types, the one connecting it with Augustine, the other with Becket. At bottom the two are the same, the difference

¹ 24th November, 1649. See Carlyle's *Cromwell*, letter 116, "Before Waterford."

² Hotten's reprint, i. 25.

³ *Hudibras*, part ii. cantos 1 and 3 (Murray's reprint of 1744, ed. 1869, pp. 140, 194, 197).

⁴ Marvel (Murray's reprint), p. 91.

as to which Archbishop was concerned being immaterial. The story, being told by Wace, is without question older than Becket. The traditional origin, therefore, must be sought in the legend of Augustine. The earlier authors are consistent in referring it to him. It is not till the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the Becket variant emerges. And it is not until the seventeenth century that we hear of any alternative explanation in the direction of an attempt to rationalize the origin. Fuller, whose observations on the legend in his *Church History* have already been cited, returned to the subject in his *Worthies*,¹ and endeavoured to explain the epithet "longtailed" by saying that "some will have the English so called from wearing a pouch "or poake (a bag to carry their baggage in) behind their backs, whilst "probably the proud Monsieurs had their lacquies for that purpose." He was, for his own part, of opinion that the French were the founders of this aspersion, although regarding its precise origin he was far from dogmatic. "If any will have the Kentish so called," he says, referring to the epithet Longtails applied to the men of Kent, "from dragging and drawing boughs "of trees behind them, which afterwards they advanced above their heads, "and so partly cozened, partly threatened, King William the Conqueror to "continue their ancient customes,² I say if any will impute it to this original "I will not oppose."

Fynes Moryson in 1617 broke new ground with a suggestion the whimsical irrelevancy of which makes it difficult to follow and impossible to accept.³ "The Kentish men of old were said to have tayles because," "trafficking in the Low-Countries they never paid full payments of what "they did owe but still left some part unpaid."

Du Cange, with the frankness characteristic of a great scholar who could afford sometimes to be not quite sure, owned his uncertainty, but hinted that possibly the English got their nickname from the tails of their shoes,⁴

¹ Fuller's *Worthies* (Kent) edition, 1662, p. 63; cited in Mr. Dyce's notes to *Skelton's Works*, iii. 186-8.

² An allusion to the well-known story—scouted by Mr. Freeman (iii. 539)—chronicled by William Thorn. *Decem Scriptorum*, 1786.

³ Fynes Moryson's *Itinerary*, 1617, iii. 53.

⁴ Propter caudas calceorum quibus si præ ceteris nationibus delectabantur; sed hæc modo non omnino mens aridet. *Du Cange voce caudatus*.

those prolongations of the toes which at one time were so remarkable a feature in the dress of the middle ages. And he made two alternative suggestions besides, that it perhaps meant foppish,¹ or cowardly.²

There is a modern tendency to attempt to explain away the epithet altogether, to refine it into a metaphor. Professor Wattenbach's suggestion to regard *caudatus* as a figurative offshoot of *queue* may be remembered. But an explanatory hypothesis, apparently more in favour, takes another line. As coward,—supposed to come from *coue* (Old French for a tail), and to mean radically one with his tail between his legs,—is derived from the Latin *cauda*, so by a parallel process *caudatus* has been thought to mean rather "cowed" than "tailed." One learned glossarist³ has thus accounted for it, observing that this sense arose "probably from the fact of frightened "animals dropping the tail in fear or turning tail in flight." These various suggestions call for critical examination.

17. *Suggested origins discussed.*

I. It will be well to eliminate suggestions found to be entirely without corroboration in the examples of the living epithet collected above. Thus the facts furnish no indications to support the contentions

- (1) that *caudatus* ever had any connection with shoes;
- (2) that it ever had the significance of foppish;
- (3) that it related to a baggage satchel behind the back;
- (4) that it had any connection with the boughs carried by Kentishmen when they met William the Conqueror;
- (5) that it had any connection with half-paid bills in the Low Countries;
- (6) that it had any reference to a peculiar way of dressing the hair, or to that fruitful subject of satire, the long skirts of the ladies—the "syde-taillis" of Sir David Lindsay's poem.

¹ Quid si ut nitidulos et comptos sugillarint?

² Videntur Caudati appellati voce tunc recepta qua timidos et pusillanimes.

³ H. T. Riley's glossary to *Rishanger's Chronica*, Rolls Series. The same line of reasoning is adopted by Mr. T. A. Archer in *The Crusade of Richard I.*, p. 26, and by Dr. F. Chance in *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, vii. 349.

These six hypotheses may with all safety be refused further hearing. A plain tail puts them down.

II. This leaves but two alternatives. Was *caudatus* a word really denoting and meant to denote tailed?

Or, was it merely a word meaning coward, a metaphor taken from the tail of a cowed dog?

In other words, whether did the epithet spring from the tail or the tail from the epithet?

Anthropologists and philologists will note that this raises precisely the issue so long and keenly fought between rival schools of thought in regard to the origin of myths. The "disease of language" school is represented in the proposition that men started a theory of tails to account for a word *caudatus* which they had ceased to understand. Perhaps the anthropological school is represented in the opposite view, that the epithet arose because the tails were believed to exist.

In corroboration of the doctrine already sufficiently established in these pages that such a belief was easy, there is no need to appeal to the general mediæval faith in the miraculous, it is only necessary to refer to Mr. Baring Gould's brief but entertaining disquisition¹ on Tailed Men, bristling with proofs from all ages and from all parts of the earth—proofs to which much more² might be added. Mr. Baring Gould himself as a child was taught by his Devonshire nurse that all Cornishmen were born with tails, and he remained in that faith until he had cross-examined a native of Cornwall on the subject.

It is scarcely needful to cite Lord Monboddo's strong opinion³ that the existence of tailed men was so well vouched "that we cannot disbelieve it "or even doubt of it without rejecting all human testimony and resolving

¹ In his *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*.

² For example, Mr. W. G. Black refers me to Tyson's curious essay on the Pigmies of the Ancients recently reprinted, by D. Nutt, 1894, and Mr. G. P. Johnston to John Struys's *Voyages*, chap. xi. See also *Notes and Queries*, 7th series, vii. 350, viii. 355. Daily papers of this date (20 October, 1895,) announce a Frenchman's discovery of a tailed man in Africa!

³ *Origin and Progress of Language*, 2nd ed., vol. I, book ii., cap. iii., p. 257. N. and Q., 7th series, vii. 433.

"to believe nothing but what we have seen." Perhaps, in view of the theory of Darwin—himself a man of Kent, the home of the legendary tails—the old opinion must not be dealt with too harshly. When contrasted with modern speculations regarding the probable arboreal ancestry of man, the worst that can be said of the legend-mongers and of Lord Monboddo is that they were somewhat pre-scientific. However that might be, enough has been said to serve the present purpose of demonstrating that in the dark ages such a belief was entirely reasonable according to the current standards.

With that fact clearly in our minds we can approach the questions with which this sub-section began.

III. The evidence at once clarifies the problem. The epithet *caudatus* is first recorded in 1190. Then, as subsequently, it was reserved for Englishmen. Englishmen never applied it to foreigners—a fact of very high importance. And it is more important still to observe that long before 1190 there was already current in English chronicle a story investing certain Englishmen with actual tails. In 1190 it is quite certain that the epithet was no pun.

There is not one instance to establish the proposition that the radical essential meaning of *caudatus* was *coward*. It certainly was not so at first, and if it decisively was so at any time the proofs are still to seek. The two passages most likely to be relied upon as proofs are those from Matthew Paris and John Oxenedes.¹ But to speak of the cowardice of *caudati*, or to talk of a fugitive as *caudatus*, full of guile, and unstable, is not to say that *caudatus* means a coward.

If it ever had that meaning, were there no caitiffs but Englishmen to whom to apply it? Was there amongst them such a depth of poltroonery that a special epithet was required so inapplicable to the cowards of other nations as never to be used to them? This is the fatal flaw in the rationalised modern conception of the origin of the epithet—the attempt to wriggle out of the tail. If *caudatus* meant coward it must have been a generic term; but, so far as can be gathered from the many examples, it never was a generic

¹ Quoted in Chapter 4, above.

term—it was thirled to Englishmen. *Caudatus* connoted Englishman, and *Anglicus* dragged *caudatus* after it.

18. *An opinion.*

It would be absurd to think that what we have seen attested as an existing natural phenomenon in the sixteenth century by the Corypheus of Anatomy, and the affidavit of forty Puritan dragoons, would stick in the throats and prove too much for the credence of the eighth to the twelfth centuries. Originating how it might—and for that there is simply no evidence to go upon¹—there was in the twelfth century a clear belief in England that, as a consequence of Augustine's curse, certain southern Englishmen had been miraculously stricken, for themselves and their posterity, with tails. What was believed in England by Englishmen about Englishmen, and is perhaps not yet wholly disbelieved² as an existing fact, might well be adopted without question on the continent—qualifications of places and person being naturally left out of account, and the broad proposition gaining currency that Englishmen had tails. This is the actual course which, according to late twelfth century chronicle, events took, pointing to the necessity of the opinion that the tail did not spring from the epithet, but the epithet from the tail. The present unprofitable compilation, therefore, which Lambarde might perhaps have stigmatised as a covetous gathering of lying fables, is a contribution to the history not of a mistaken metaphor but of a vagary, neither unintelligible nor unique, in popular belief.

Thus an odd adjective has been destined to connect with its slender link of association events so far distant in time and so unrelated as Augustine's mission to England, the murder of the great Archbishop Becket, the

¹ There are no indications that I can find of the existence of a village called Muglington, the mention of which does not emerge until the fifteenth century. Had it been otherwise it would have seemed not impossible to account for the tail story as a legend called into being to explain the place-name by a mistaken etymology. But the oldest forms of the story containing no etymological explanations, lend no countenance to a derivation of the adjective from a place-name misunderstood.

² See Notes and Queries, 7th series vi. 347, vii. 212, viii. 36.

crusading-adventures of Richard Coeur de Leon, the Scottish and French wars of English Kings, pre-Reformation hagiology, and post-Reformation criticism, with the satire and the science, the humour and the poetry of more than five hundred years. The fly in amber is largely represented on many a shelf of curios in the museum of history.

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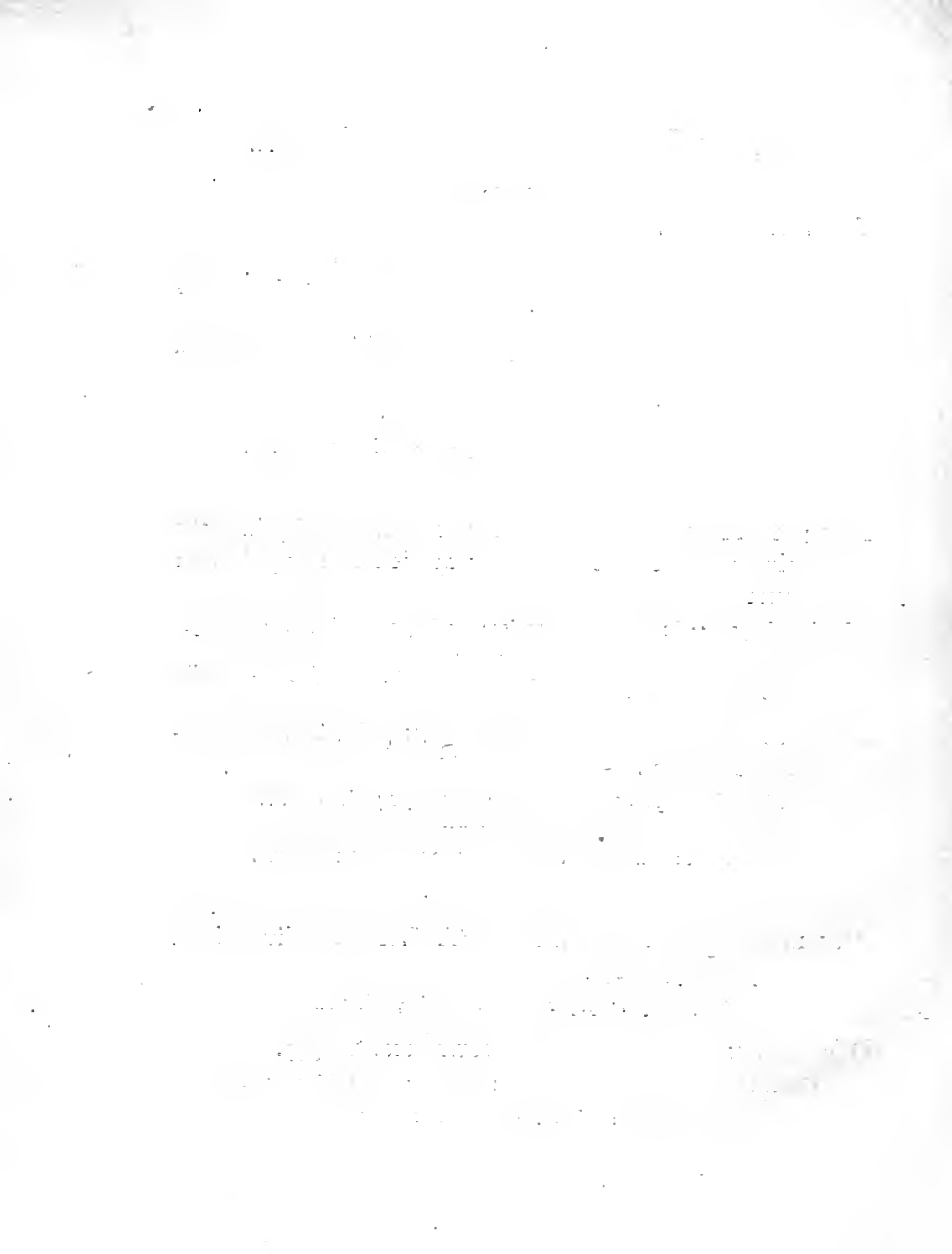
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